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ABSTRACT

It is important that the opinions of school principals be known and given serious consideration in the student teaching program. This is especially true when a major program change is anticipated or is being implemented. Although there is considerable conflict in research about the effect of the amount and arrangement of time devoted to student teaching and its effect on student teacher performance, there is considerable support for requiring more time in student teaching. Thirty-two principals of elementary and secondary schools who had participated in student teaching programs with a variety of time arrangements were asked to give opinions toward a full semester, full time student teaching program. The principals surveyed clearly favored the full semester approach over other various arrangements requiring less time. They also identified areas that could be of concern to them in the implementation and operation of the program: (1) time in student teaching; (2) attitudes of students, teachers, and parents toward this program; (3) quality of instruction; (4) maintenance of student teacher interest and progress; (5) classroom management; (6) personal problems of student teachers; (7) second teaching environment; (8) support of university supervisors; and (9) organization and operation of the program. (CJ)

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OPINIONS OF AFFILIATED SCHOOL PRINCIPALS TOWARD A FULL SEMESTER STUDENT TEACHING PROGRAM

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Biographical Summary

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify opinions of affiliated principals toward a full semester, full-time student teaching program. This study was conducted at the end of the first year of a full semester, full-time student teaching program. The subjects were 32 affiliated principals of elementary, junior high, and high schools who had also participated in student teaching programs with a variety of time arrangements, i.e., full-time for eight weeks, half-day for a full semester. Responses to an opinnionaire indicate that principals clearly favor a full semester, full-time student teaching program over other time arrangements.

OPINIONS OF AFFILIATED SCHOOL PRINCIPALS TOWARD A FULL SEMESTER STUDENT TEACHING PROGRAM

To directors of student teaching programs, supervising teachers, and student teachers, the affiliated principal (A.T.E., 1973) is a very important person. The principal is usually the first practicing professional educator the student teacher encounters in the school. The principal is the educational leader and sets the overall tone of the school program. The principal's conception of what constitutes a good student teaching program will determine, to a great extent, the range of experiences available to student teachers. The example the principal establishes in recommending supervising teachers, in interpersonal relationships with student teachers, supervising teachers and representatives from the teacher preparation program, contribute to or detract from the effectiveness of the total student teaching experience. The affiliated principal must be able to support and explain the student teaching program to the many and varied publics of an elementary or secondary school. Thus, it is important that the opinions of affiliated principals be known and given serious consideration in the student teaching program. This is especially true when a major program change is anticipated and/or being implemented.

There is general agreement that student teaching is one of the most important parts of the teacher preparation program. Although there is considerable conflict in research about the effect of the amount and arrangement of time devoted to student teaching and its effect on student teacher performance (Moore, 1973; Denton and Bennett, 1975; Elliott, 1975; Davis, 1976), there is considerable support for requiring more time in

student teaching.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to identify opinions of affiliated principals toward a full semester, full-time student teaching program. This study was conducted at the end of the first year of a full semester, full-time student teaching program. Prior to that time, a variety of time arrangements, i.e., full-time for eight weeks, half-day for a full semester, were operative. Under the new program, student teachers devoted full-time to student teaching for a 15 week semester. Student teachers received 12-15 semester hours of credit and were not permitted to enroll in other courses.

Subjects

The subjects were 32 affiliated principals of elementary (grades K-6), junior high (grades 7-8), and high schools (grades 9-12) participating in the student teaching program of the Department of Educational Curriculum and Instruction at Texas A&M University. Each principal was selected on the basis of participation in the student teaching program prior to the implementation and during the first year of the full semester program. Participation in these programs of differing arrangements of time provided experiences on which to make evaluative judgments about the full semester program.

Data Collection and Analysis

The instrument used for data collection was a 23 item Likert-type (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree) opinionnaire. Items were written with assistance from university supervisors and affiliated principals and designed to elicit opinions and observations about specific program attributes.

In planning sessions with affiliated principals prior to the beginning of the full semester program, the following areas of potential concern were identified:

1. Time in student teaching
2. Response of students, teachers, and parents to student teachers being in the school for a full semester
3. Quality of instruction, i.e., would the quality of instruction be affected by having student teachersin classrooms for an extended time?
4. Comparison of full semester with old program
5. Maintenance of interest and progress of student teachers
6. Classroom management
7. Personal problems of student teachers
8. Second teaching environment
9. Support of university supervisors
10. Organization and operation of the full semester program
11. Quality of the product of a full semester program

One or more opinionnaire items were written for each of these areas of concern. The opinionnaire was given to each affiliated principal at the end of the first year (two semesters) of the full semester program. Responses were anonymous in that names of school districts, schools or principals were not used.

Results

In Table 1, the number and percent of responses of affiliated principals toward the full semester student teaching program are shown. Principals were strongly supportative of the time (items 1,2) differential between the two programs. Ninety-six percent felt that the full semester

provides about the right amount of time in student teaching and 87 percent indicated that student teachers had not complained about the time required.

--Insert Table 1 about here.--

principals must be sensitive to the attitudes and feelings of their publics (parents, students) and their teachers about what is happening in their schools. Responses to items 3, 4, and 5 show that principals felt that parents, students, and teachers did not exhibit negative feelings toward student teachers during the full semester program.

A primary concern of principals, teachers, and university supervisors was the effects of an extended student teaching program on the quality of classroom instruction. Responses to items 6 and 7 indicate that supervising teachers did not lose contact with their students and about 69 percent felt that having a student teacher for a full semester improved the quality of instruction.

It is clear that principals felt that the interest and progress of student teachers was maintained throughout the semester. To item 8, almost 94 percent indicated that interest remained high and almost 97 percent believed that the performance of student teachers continued to improve (item 19).

Classroom management is a key issue in any student teaching program. This is almost always the uppermost concern of student teachers as they prepare for their assignments. It is not unusual for a "honeymoon" stage to exist between students and student teachers. While most student teachers experience difficulties in classroom management, only one-third of the principals felt that student teachers in a full semester program experienced more management problems than those in the old program.

Student teaching is often a contributing factor when personal problems arise. Changing schedules and priorities of a student teacher often con-

flicts with the life style developed over three-four years as a student. Schedule conflicts with part-time jobs often lead to financial problems which can intensify over a semester. Affiliated principals were ambivalent about this area. Sixty-four percent felt that student teachers in a full semester program did not experience any more problems than those in the old program. However, this area should continue to receive close scrunity.

One feature of the full semester program was provisions for a second teaching environment (items 12-16). This provided for student teachers to spend approximately two weeks in a second teaching field, a different grade level, or a different school or district. Scheduling, communication, planning, and flexibility were essential for this part of the program to work smoothly. Although principals viewed this as a very beneficial part of student teaching, approximately 40 percent indicated that it did create problems. This part of the program will require some modification in planning and scheduling.

University supervisors perform many roles. Providing support and guidance during times of program changes are especially important to principals. The stance of the principal is usually a cooperative one <u>if</u> appropriate support is readily available. More than 80 percent (items 17-18) felt that university supervisors provided the needed support during this period.

Almost 97 percent of the principals felt that the full semester program (item 19) was well organized and operated smoothly in their schools. Much of the credit for this response must be given to principals and supervising teachers who were deeply involved in the initial planning of the program; a process which covered two years. Further, 86 percent of the principals indicated that there were fewer problems under the full semester

than there were under the old programs with varying time arrangements (item 20).

Increasing the length of time in student teaching increases supervisory responsibilities proportionally (item 21). This is a factor which must be carefully considered when moving from a program requiring part of a semester to one requiring a full semester. The potential for supervising teacher"burnout" is very real.

It was assumed that an extension of the time in student teaching would result in a better qualified beginning teacher. Opinions of affiliated principals seem to validate that assumption (items 22-23). If this is indeed true, then serious consideration should be given to providing a full semester of student teaching experiences for all those preparing to teach.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify opinions of affiliated principals about a full semester student teaching program. An opinionnaire was developed which sought to address concerns of principals. Thirty-two principals who had also participated in the student teaching program when different time arrangements were required, responded to the opinionnaire. The overall response was highly positive. On the basis of this study, this group of affiliated principals clearly favor a full semester, full-time student teaching over various arrangements requiring less time.

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TABLE 1

OPINIONS OF AFFILIATED SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

TOWARD A FULL SEMESTER STUDENT TEACHING PROGRAM

Key: 1 = Strongly Disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Undecided
4 = Agree
5 = Strongly Agree

Item No.	Item	Percent and Number of Responses (N=32) 1	2	3	4	5
1.	The full semester of student teaching provides about the right amount of time needed for the student teacher to develop the skills necessary for a beginning teacher.	-	-	3.13 (1)	40.63 (13)	56.25 (18)
*2.	The student teachers in my school complained that the full semester was too much time to devote to student teaching.	28.12 (9)	59.37 (19)	6.25 (2)	6.25 (2)	-
*3.	Many of my students seemed to grow tired of having a student teacher for such a long time.	20.67 (6)	62.07 (18)	6.93 (2)	10.35 (3)	-
4.	My teachers seemed to really enjoy having a student teacher for a full semester.	-	3.13 (1)	6.25 (2)	31.25 (10)	59.38 (19)
*5.	Parents of students in my school have expressed concern about "over exposure" to student teachers during the full semester.	32.14 (9)	57.14 (16)	3.57 (1)	7.14 (2)	-
6.	I feel that my teachers did not "lose contact" with student because of the length of the student teaching program.	-	-	6.25 (2)	53.13 (17)	40.63 (13)
7.	I feel that having a student teacher for a full semester has improved the quality of instruction for students in this school.	-	6.25 (2)	25.00 (8)	53.13 (17)	15.63 (5)

TABLE 1 (continued)

Item No.	Item	Percent and Number of Responses (N=32) 1	2	3	4	5
8.	I feel that the student teachers in my school have maintained a high level of interest throughout the full semester.	-	3.13 (1)	3.13 (1)	59.38 (19)	34.38 (11)
9.	The performance of student teachers in my school continued to improve over the full semester.	-	-	3.13 (1)	68.75 (22)	28.13 (9)
*10.	The full semester student teachers in my school seem to have experienced more problems relating to classroom management than student teachers under the old program.	30.00 (9)	36.67 (11)	3.33 (1)	20.00 (6)	10.00 (3)
*11.	The full semester student teachers in my school seem to have experienced more personal problems (arranging schedules for part-time work and child care, personal finances, emotional, etc.) than student teachers under the old program.	32.14 (9)	32.14 (9)	28.57 (8)	7.14 (2)	-
12.	I feel that the second teaching environment (the time spent by the student teacher working with another teacher in a second teaching field or at a different grade level) was very beneficial for the student teachers.	-	9.69 (3)	-	64.52 (20)	25.81 (8)
*13.	The second teaching environment created some problems and concerns in my school.	12.90 (4)	48.39 (15)	6.45 (2)	25.81 (8)	6.45 (2)
14.	I feel that the student teachers in my school gained many new ideas about and insights into teaching from the second teaching environment.	-	12.90 (4)	12.90 (4)	58.07 (18)	16.13 (5)

TABLE 1 (continued)

Item No.	Item	Percent and Number of Responses (N=32) 1	2	3	4	5
15.	The teachers in my school were very willing to work with student teachers in this second teaching environment.	-	3.33 (1)	6.67 (2)	70.00 (21)	20.00 (6)
16.	I feel that the second teaching environment is a valuable part of the full semester program and should be continued.	-	6.45 (2)	19.36 (6)	45.16 (14)	29.03 (9)
17.	I had sufficient contact with the university supervisor(s) during the semester(s).	-	6.45 (2)	6.25 (2)	56.25 (18)	31.25 (10)
18.	The university supervisor(s) really helped me and my teachers get through the full semester of student teaching.	-	3.13 (1)	15.63 (5)	50.00 (16)	31.25 (10)
19.	The full semester of student teaching program has been well-organized and has operated smoothly in my school.	-	-	3.12 (1)	59.38 (19)	37.50 (12)
20.	The full semester of student teaching has created fewer problems in my school than were created under the old program.	-	3.45 (1)	10.35 (3)	62.07 (18)	24.14 (7)
21.	The full semester of student teaching has increased the supervisory responsibilities over those of the old program.	6.90 (2)	17.24 (5)	6.90 (2)	51.72 (15)	17.24 (5)
22.	I feel that the experiences provided during the full semester of student teaching have resulted in a much better qualified beginning teacher than was possible under the old program.	-	3.23 (1)	3.23 (1)	45.16 (14)	48.39 (15)

TABLE 1 (continued)

Item No.	Item	Percent and Number of Responses (N=32) 1	2	3	4	5
23.	If given two beginning teachers of equal qualifications with the one difference being that one had student taught for a full semester and the other for 8 weeks, I would recommend the student teacher from the full semester program.	3.23 (1)	3.23 (1)	6.45 (2)	38.71 (12)	48.39 (15)

*Negatively stated items